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ABSTRACT

Five principles that help to improve learning and schooling are: (1) Every detail in the physical environment of a school, no matter how small, matters and contributes in a cumulative way to the overall tone. (2) Students should be allowed to make and carry out educational decisions that they can handle. (3) All courses, to the fullest extent possible, should be experiential. (4) The school and community should cooperate to the fullest extent possible. (5) The school atmosphere should be exciting and interesting. Although public schools currently are less than perfect learning environments, exciting and creative environments can be nourished so that genuine learning does take place. With sensitive leadership, these environments can spread within the system to infect the whole and to embrace the surrounding communities. (SAS)

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INTRODUCTION--FOXFIRE 6

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INTRODUCTION

I constantly find myself in awkward situations. Among the most uncomfortable are those in which I have accepted an invitation to work as a consultant for a day or two in a public school. Suddenly there I am, standing in front of a group of teachers who have every reason to expect me to tell them either that they are doing something wrong, or that they should be doing something else in addition to the heavy load they're already carrying. Why else would I be there? And this, given the fact that I have never seen any of them at work with their students, have no idea how they operate, or what specific daily problems they face. You see why it's an awkward situation. . . .

Such visits have given me the chance, however, to see firsthand a number of other public schools besides the one in which I teach. They've helped me grow. Sometimes I've developed lasting friendships with colleagues in those schools. And always we trade notes—which of us has the better principal, lunchroom, or working conditions—and combat stories.

Sometimes, on these visits, I'm asked for advice. I usually refuse, simply because I don't know the situation well enough (and wouldn't if I stayed a month). But recently, over coffee, a new friend and I sat down and half in jest, half seriously, posed the following:

Accept for the moment the fact that because there are too many variables at work, public schools will never be perfect learning environments. Accept also the fact that despite all the voices raised against them, and despite all the financial chaos, they are here to stay.

Now draw up a list of observations or principles or truths—say, five or six—that could be used as yardsticks to measure how any given public school is doing, or how far it has to go, given the potentials and limitations that exist within that institutional framework.

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We drew up a list.

Over the next few months, as I became more and more convinced that this idea of a checklist was a workable notion, I refined it, and I present it here, realizing with some embarrassment that most of these principles are old truths "rediscovered" again and again, but realizing also that most schools still have a long way to go toward implementing them, and so they bear repeating. The 950-pupil consolidated public high school in which I teach, for example, has not, and undoubtedly will not, move wholesale to translate a list like this into action. None of the schools in which I have visited will either. I guess that's to be expected. However, after fourteen years of continuous, daily trial-and-error and observation inside the public-school system, I know that these principles *can* be recognized in that system, and I believe that *the extent* to which they have been recognized and acted upon by any public school is the extent to which that institution is becoming truly and sensitively responsive to the needs of the students and the communities it serves.

First: Every detail in the physical environment of a school, no matter how small, matters and contributes in a cumulative way to the overall tone.

Some of these details are so minor as to be unnoticeable by the ordinary observer, but in their own small way, each makes a difference that can lead to a sense of, "*Something's* right (or wrong) here, even though I don't know what it is."

Recently I taught an experimental course of five students. Because there were no classrooms available during that period, we "floated" from day to day from one available space to another. One of the rooms we used from time to time was a small windowless conference room that was almost womblike in its isolation from the rest of the school environment. Every time those students and I were in that room, their behavior was significantly different from their norm. It was almost as though they were lobotomized. Only through great effort were we able to break through that listless, unemotional trance and carry on some form of discussion. In another environment—one with windows and space and air—they were completely different people. We all recognized the effect the conference room had on us, but none of us was able to pinpoint exactly what was happening there. Somehow the combination of colors, windowless walls, isolation, and the incessant buzzing of the fluorescent lighting transformed us in a noticeable way. Had I been assigned to that space

for the entire quarter and not been able to observe those same five students in different environments, I might have assumed that both the course and the students were lost causes—an experiment not worth repeating. How many other teachers struggle with students daily and assume the problems they are having are due to the students, or themselves, and forget the impact of environment on behavior?

On a more obvious level, classrooms with desks (often covered with graffiti) bolted to the floor, bathrooms with doorless stalls, shared locker spaces, indifferent food served indifferently, raucous bell systems, intercoms used so inconsiderately that every activity in the school is shattered by full-volume announcements like, "Teachers, pardon the interruption, but Susan Jones' mother is here to take her to a dentist appointment," all in fortresslike institutional structures with endless cement block halls and bulldozed, paved surroundings devoted more to efficient crowd control and total lack of privacy (read "trouble") than anything else—all such elements conspire to create an atmosphere that is alien, dehumanizing, intimidating, and filled with an undercurrent of frustration.

In one high school I visited recently, the signal to change classes was a deafening air-raid siren. In our own school, it is a long, piercing whine that is impossible to talk above and that goes through one's head with an intensity that almost translates into physical pain. Why any manufacturer would be instructed—or allowed—to create such a device, and why any humane architect would patronize such a company, is beyond me, especially considering the fact that it's not really needed at all. (How many colleges or universities, for example, can you name that use a bell system?)

Sometimes the physical environment so conspires against certain kinds of activities that they are simply eliminated from the life of the school. Our organization has actively sponsored concerts and plays, but we are about to give up in despair, not because the students don't enjoy such events, but because such events must be held in a gym that doubles as an auditorium. The space itself is simply not a workable combination for more reasons than I could list here, foremost among them being impossible acoustics and demonic seating arrangements.

Despite the fact that such buildings are built, there are plenty of solutions available once the problems with them are realized. The possibility of solutions, however, must be seen as a series of priceless opportunities to bring the second principle into play.

Second: Students must be allowed a measure of control over that environment, and a degree of decision-making responsibility within it. If this is ignored, the natural and healthy tendency students have to exert some influence over their surroundings manifests itself in ways the teachers and administrators find unacceptable, and much of their energy is spent in pitched battles with students over "classroom management" and in sleuthing out those responsible for vandalism and litter. The amount of "antisocial" behavior in a school is often directly proportional to the amount of hostility students feel toward an institution that is not responding to their needs as human beings.

The most obvious place to begin is at the classroom level. In most high-school classrooms, the norm, except for the blackboard and bulletin board, is totally blank walls and bland colors. (Walk into the only environment a child can call his or her own—usually a bedroom at home—and compare. If a child of mine actually preferred an environment with no color, nothing on the walls, no piles of books and posters and baseball gloves, and projects in progress, I would view that as cause for some alarm.)

At this classroom level, confronted with a teacher who maintains a filing cabinet full of laminated and dated bulletin-board displays ("This one about commas goes up at Halloween each year"), we may have a problem. Such a teacher may already have settled into a psychological rut that has, for example, manifested itself in lecture notes used year after year, and it may be too late for change.

But if it's not, some wonderful and appropriate things can happen. In our classroom, when students wanted to fill the walls with photographs, letters, documents, county maps, and quilts—all items appropriate to our work—they were given permission by the principal as long as they did not stick anything to or mount anything on the walls that might damage the paint. Undaunted, they eased up several of the suspended ceiling's tiles, hung long wooden dowel rods from wires they attached to the steel girders above, replaced the tiles undamaged, and hung the quilts and display panels from the rods. The walls remain unscarred.

Later, needing additional work, storage, and display spaces, they designed and built other pieces of classroom furniture such as cabinets, shelves, and counters, and set them into place. The ones not used as work spaces are now covered with pieces of folk art, tools, items that contacts have made for us, and supplies.

Most recently, deciding that the microscopic darkroom the school's architect had designed was unworkable, they designed and

built a new darkroom inside our classroom with the help of the school custodian, who jury-rigged the necessary plumbing. The only requirement placed on the students by the principal and school board was that the new room conform in every way to the existing fire codes, thus giving students an opportunity to deal with yet another challenge. The outside walls of the darkroom are covered, floor to ceiling, with four-by-eight-foot sheets of bulletin-board material, thus tripling our space for exhibits of students' photographs and the like. While some classrooms nearby have sustained heavy damage from random student vandalism, ours has not suffered at all. The room is ablaze with color and life and energy, and has become a *working environment* that accurately reflects the amount of energy and commitment that is expended there.

Outside the classroom, students in our school have gotten permission to create at least one new mural a year to paint onto the blank walls in the commons and entrance areas. The principal was a little dubious about the first mural until we talked a professional artist into helping out and promised the principal final approval of the design. Three are completed now, one measuring eighteen by twenty-two feet, and another is under way. This series of low-cost, creative efforts can go on for years, will involve hundreds of students over those years, and will totally change the tone of those bland, impersonal spaces.

In a large urban school I visited recently, students in the horticulture and biology classes had voted to "adopt" a large outdoor gathering area as part of their classroom work. There they created a jewel of a park with gravel walks, wooden benches, and huge planters, which they keep filled with potted flowering plants, rotating them in season. On the fall day I was there, thousands of chrysanthemums of all colors were just about to burst into bloom.

In another school, as part of the curriculum, students in the home-economics classes work with their teacher and the dietician to create the school's menus, and then rotate for a week at a time through the kitchen to help prepare and serve those meals and make them as attractive and palatable as possible, using their imaginations to find ways around the budget they have to work with, and other institutional restrictions.

Allowing students to have a constructive impact on their surroundings in ways like the above is important, but it is not nearly enough. They must also be entrusted with the power to make real decisions that affect far more than the physical environment.

For example, in the magazine classes Margie Bennett and I conduct (out of which this book came), the students decide individually all details concerning their own articles (for which they do all the interviews, take and print all the photographs, etc.), and collectively decide such items as what the magazine's cover design and colors will be—seemingly mundane decisions, but for students who have never had experience in making such choices, enormously important. These experiences become part of their normal English curriculum and part of their daily routine. The same pattern is followed in the other classes we sponsor where students produce record albums, radio shows, television shows, active and passive solar collectors, and public exhibitions of photography. Their decisions affect not only the final product, but also such things as the specific budgets those classes will operate under given the financial resources available to us at any given time.

On the organizational level, my staff and I meet early every Monday morning to look at our organization. Sometimes we talk about specific students and strategies for meeting their needs. We also outline all things that need to be decided that week. Students are encouraged to attend the meeting.

That same day, during each period, the various Foxfire classes come together in one room to discuss each issue and vote. The votes are carried forward, cumulatively, through the school day. At the end of the day, the votes determine the decision. Those students who want to be involved in carrying it out begin to do so.

In a recent week, for example, among other things, students discussed and voted on:

- The disposition of an automobile donated to our organization. (They voted to sell it through sealed bids and split the profits between the school's beautification fund and Foxfire's scholarship fund. Students split up into teams to draft the radio and newspaper announcements. The car was sold and the money deposited in the funds the students had dictated.)
- Our response to a weekly regional newspaper that had reprinted material and photographs from *The Foxfire Book* on its front page without our permission and without credit to the source in any form. (The students voted to draft a letter to the publisher demanding an apology in print in the next edition of the paper. The letter was drafted by one of the classes and sent, and the apology appeared

on the paper's front page. A subscriber to our magazine who brought the matter to our attention was thanked by another team of students.)

• Our response to a T-shirt manufacturer who had taken photographs of some of our contacts directly from the pages of our books and reproduced them on a line of T-shirts he was distributing throughout our region. (The students voted to sue the manufacturer and are now involved in the suit.)

The rule of thumb we use, and one that will probably evolve in time as we get better at, and more self-confident with, this whole business, is to turn over to the students all decisions concerning our organization that they themselves can be responsible for and implement to completion. This they do in an atmosphere where they learn to weigh the possible consequences of such decisions for themselves and the organization, and where mistakes that are made are accepted as new opportunities to learn—not as opportunities to condemn the students who made them.

There are parallels here that can be extended to any school as a whole. Each day, in every school in the nation, scores of decisions are made by the principal and assistant principal that affect the movements and activities of students within. Often these decisions are made by adults *not* because they refuse to believe students could make them just as well, but because it is so much more expedient to make them themselves. And they're right. But one of our mandates is to help students learn to make responsible choices, and the fact is that schools, as microcosms of society, can be perfect learning laboratories for building these skills. It is somewhat less convenient, but schools built for the convenience of adults are often schools where little learning takes place.

I am not advocating—as in some alternative schools—that students make *all* decisions, including such things as whether or not a teacher should be fired. That would place an impossibly heavy load on students' shoulders. Nor am I advocating the situation where students are allowed to make token, sham decisions of no consequence as a means of tricking them into believing they have some "say" in order to help keep them under control. I am advocating real responsibility of the best type that *is possible* within a normal public school, which is, granted, a controlled situation where adults will always be "in charge," but where they can also be regarded by their students as allies and mentors and guides rather than the opposite.

How could the process work? Some schools have experimented

creatively and well with the idea of student councils. A problem, of course, is that many student councils are not regarded as truly representative of, or responsible to, their classmates, and so elections degenerate into popularity contests and, knowing this, schools respond by diluting the responsibilities the student councils have to the point where the whole situation becomes even more of a joke. The members are allowed to plan the junior-senior dance, but little else.

A better, and certainly more lively, instructive, and interesting system would be for each homeroom to elect, on a rotating basis, a representative who would attend the weekly teachers' meetings. Substitutes could take the place of representatives who could not make a given meeting due to illness or other such conflicts. At these meetings, in addition to normal business (and, frankly, I can't think of a meeting I've been to in recent memory where something was discussed that students should not be allowed to hear, but they could always be excused if such matters arose), the principal and assistant principal would outline those items that needed student-body action. The students in attendance would ask as many questions as necessary to make sure they could present all the facts and ramifications to their homerooms as accurately as possible. Then, during homeroom periods each morning, the student representatives would present the issues one by one, lead the discussions, and take the vote. The homeroom teachers would be there to help students over snags. Votes from the homerooms would all be tallied by student groups as they were reported, and decisions, as completed, would be carried to the front office for announcement and implementation. The student newspaper would regularly report all tallies, along with needed clarifications and explanations.

What decisions would be made? An enlightened principal could easily get an idea simply by listing all decisions made in the course of one week at the administrative level, and then looking at the list. Much of it would consist of business concerning pep rallies, club meetings, test schedules, lunch schedules, disciplinary restrictions, smoking-area regulations, and the like, all of which lend themselves easily to student input. That's where they'd start. And what about decisions such as whether to use a bell system at all? Or the extent to which classes could be interrupted by such intrusions as intercom announcements? Those, too, should be subject to student input. And as the process became established, students themselves would begin to identify other areas that would justify student choice. In fact, once a certain public-school mind set is overcome,

it becomes increasingly difficult to identify issues and decisions in which the students should *not* be directly involved. Excuses for not involving them even in matters as serious as strategies for dealing with teen-age pregnancy or alcohol and drug abuse begin to sound hollow and defensive.

The fact is that students in possession of accurate information are far more skillful, responsible, creative, and moral in making and carrying out decisions than most adults are willing to admit. Schools trying this for the first time sometimes give up in frustration from a feeling that the students aren't being responsible enough—that the students are "playing with them." The schools give up too easily. Invariably, these are schools where, usually for good reason, the students refuse to believe that their collective voice is going to be taken seriously. They are playing with the school because they feel that the school is, once again, playing with them. It takes time and patience—a slow forging of atypical alliances between young people and adults—and it's worth every ounce of energy it takes.

Third: All courses, to the fullest extent possible, should be experiential—rooted in the real. (At this point, every teacher who's forgotten should review Dale's Cone of Experience in that dusty educational philosophy text.)

A friend of mine has a young son who just completed a ninth-grade unit in botany as part of his science requirement. Not once did the class go outdoors. Not once did the teacher bring plant materials in. The entire course was taught from a text, undoubtedly without passion or conviction. The fact that any teacher in 1980, given all we know about education, would be allowed to—or even choose to—teach a unit like *botany* in that fashion is grounds for parent/student revolt.

Teachers must constantly ask themselves how material they are covering can be brought to life and application in the real world for the benefit of the students involved and for the ultimate benefit of the larger society they will enter. If teachers cannot, or will not, make those linkages, the course should probably not be taught at all.

Let me give one example.

One of my favorite students brought along an American history text during a recent trip to speak at an educational conference. He was studying for a test. One of the sections he had to learn concerned Spanish monasteries that were established during an early period in our history for the purpose of converting Indians to Chris-

tianity and to the Spanish way of life and to loyalty to the Crown. Now, the course over, that student tells me that he remembers nothing of that section of the book; he only remembers the motel room in which he studied it. The teacher completely missed a priceless opportunity to open up that piece of history and bring it to life through numerous real-world linkages that the students could have researched firsthand: the implicit arrogance, for example, of the missionary's calling, and the moral dilemma that must be posed by the imposition of one value system on another; to say nothing of the work of all agents of cultural change at work on that student's family, community, and throughout the Appalachian region yesterday and today; and the real—sometimes positive, sometimes negative—effect such people and organizations have on any indigenous group of people anywhere. Weeks could easily have been spent following that aspect of our history, and the fact that many of the events of the past have resulted from the desire of individuals or groups to exert dominance or influence over others. It has gone on throughout the past, it is going on today (students can witness that process in any peer group and community in this nation, and by extension come to a more focused understanding even of national and world affairs), and it will continue through all the tomorrows we have left.

How will that student deal with that fact as an adult? When confronted by injustice, for example, where will he draw his lines? To what extent will he shrug his shoulders and rationalize events and turn away, or stand for what he knows is a more moral and humane course of action in the world? He came no closer to a decision of any sort in that history course—in fact, he never saw how the material his class was covering applied to him at all—but he should have. Why else take history?

It has been shown through projects all over this country that experiential components can be built into every subject area of the curriculum, not in place of the academic aspects of the course or the basic skills, but as one of the few ways through which students master those skills and internalize them by having the chance to put them to work. The preparation of this book as a part of the language-arts offering at our school is only one small illustration of the kinds of low-cost, experiential options available to public schools today.

Alarm at declining test scores and student competence is one of the reasons some alternative schools are founded. However, some with which I am familiar turn their backs on what we know about the potential of experience, and try to correct the situation (as do

many public high schools) by "bearing down" and increasing the amount and the intensity of drill and memorization. Demanding academic rigor is justifiable, but reaching for it through numerous new kits, packages, drills, and tests usually defeats the purpose, creating, instead, students who simply respond more quickly to certain stimuli—like Pavlov's dogs—but who know not a whit more about that world outside the school, the use of those skills within the world, or learning as an independent and lifelong passion. What we too often get for our money is a better class of robots.

Think of the role of the school as being threefold (leaving aside the role of sports):

- To develop the basic skills and basic academic knowledge of students.
- To develop and nourish the more esoteric appreciations and understandings—the arts, the humanities, the areas of human artistic and moral sensitivity and concern for life on this globe—and the ways to express those appreciations and concerns through action.
- To develop and foster the qualities students must have for success in any career—curiosity, self-confidence and self-esteem, patience and persistence, vision, leadership, wisdom, and the ability to think creatively, to analyze and problem-solve, to make humane and wise decisions, and to act on them.

Now look at your school. If it's like most in this country, it pays only minimal attention to the last two (it can be argued, in fact, that many schools not only do not nourish these areas, but also somehow accomplish the *opposite* with the majority of their students) and reserves most of its energy for the first. The success ratio? Look at the fact that students have language arts for *twelve years* in most public-school systems. Now ask any college or university why it still requires its freshman remedial English courses.

"Bearing down" with increased drill and memorization has not and will not solve this problem satisfactorily, to say nothing of the fact that at least two other vital areas of a student's development go untouched. The best experiential courses, on the other hand, are not only consciously interdisciplinary, but also bring all three areas of development into complete concert.

Fourth: The school and the community should be as one. Far more than simply using the community as a laboratory, or allowing the school facilities to be used by the community in the evenings and during vacations, students and teachers must be engaged directly

with the community-at-large, forging two-way relationships that not only educate, but also endure and make a difference in the quality of life. One of the most distressing facts I encounter in every school I work with is how ignorant teachers are of the community from which their students are drawn. The teachers can sometimes recite some basic historical facts and figures and the results of some government surveys, but they know few people on a first-name basis.

This fall, for example, one of my students and I worked for several days as consultants to an urban high school in a decaying city where a group of teachers was interested in talking about and perhaps implementing some of the things we have tried. After working with them and their classes for a day, their consensus was that nothing we had talked about would work in their setting. For one thing, they claimed, there wasn't anything good about the surrounding community to celebrate, and everyone who lived there was dreaming of the day when he or she could move away. In the second place, there was so much hostility, anger, and fear that adults would be afraid to talk with students, and the students would be too fearful of their own safety to explore the area.

Believing that in a situation of this nature there is more need than ever to attend to this particular principle, I suggested we try an interview anyway. None of the teachers or students could think of a soul who would be willing to come into the school, and so a school librarian who had lived there all her life was invited. Since none of the teachers could demonstrate interviewing techniques, I spent several hours training a volunteer group of about twenty students, stressing that if anything else were to be done along these lines, members of that group would have to be the teachers.

At the appointed time, the librarian arrived, apprehensive and a little stiff ("I can't stay long; I'm very busy"), and the students arranged themselves in a semicircle around her and went to work. The teachers stayed in the background and observed. After about fifteen minutes, I could feel the mood changing as the woman relaxed and the prearranged questions of the students began to drop away and be replaced by amazed, genuine inquiries. She talked about such things as the goats she had raised as a child in the pasture where the city-block-huge school now stood, and how the gradual influx of new racial and age populations had begun to polarize and fragment what had been a cohesive community. The students were fascinated as they began to see her as a completely different human being from the one they had known previously in her professional role only.

After forty-five minutes, the pace had not slowed a bit, but since the bell was about to ring, I interrupted to ask the librarian, with the students present, how she thought things had gone. She admitted honestly that she was amazed at the quality and obvious sincerity of the students' questions. She had expected something completely different, had come prepared to dislike the experience, and in fact had not had enough time to get into numerous other areas she would have enjoyed sharing. When I asked if she knew other people in the community who would be willing to undergo the same thing, she said there were many. The students and teachers who were listening were amazed and elated at how things had turned out, and if nothing else comes of that experience at that school, all of us together at least had an opportunity to share a very nice moment, one we won't soon forget.

And if nothing else comes of that experiment, I think that would be too bad. There may be other ways to deal with the kinds of hostilities and suspicions and hatreds that exist in that area, but offhand I don't know of a better way than getting people talking together face to face, beginning to know each other for the first time, beginning to correct misconceptions and prejudices about each other, and beginning to explore together the reasons why the community is now in a siege mentality, and the strategies available for turning that around. It's hard to think of a more perfect setting for what could be one of the most fascinating and valuable high-school courses ever, set up to explore what conditions must exist for people to be able to live and work productively and positively together. It would take patience and time to implement, but the alternative is to leave all the barricades standing.

Students are basically moral—quick to recognize injustice and prejudice, and, in the proper atmosphere, challenge them. With their peer group, they sometimes make a great show about hating this group or race or that, but for most young people, those statements have not yet hardened into adult convictions.

Better still, once moved, they are willing to take action for what they believe is right. A student and I worked as consultants in a midwestern high school, and we discovered, within easy walking distance of the school, a historic feed mill still in operation that was about to be torn down, as it was in the path of a new highway project. The local students I was working with had never done interviews in the community before (despite the fact that they were enrolled in a local history course), and so we started with the mill. One of the former owners told us its history while the students

tape-recorded and took black-and-white photographs and color slides—all for the first time. Then the new owner described the battle he was waging with the highway department, told us why he had decided to take a stand against all odds, and showed us the petitions he was circulating in the city.

As we left, the students wanted to sign one of the petitions, but their local history teacher, who had been along as an observer, refused to let them. Her fear was that some school-board members might favor the highway project, and she was afraid of repercussions. We left, the students visibly disappointed, and the teacher, I believe, regretful and feeling a little guilty. Such are school politics.

The next day, on the way to the airport, I asked our driver to stop by the mill so that my student and I, at least, could sign one of the petitions. We went in and I asked for one, and the owner apologized saying that he hadn't had a chance to have new ones printed yet, but they were ordered. I asked what had happened to the stack of blank ones he had had the day before. "Well, you know those kids that were in here with you?" he asked. "When school let out, they came back with their friends and took every blank one I had. They said they were going to get them all signed and bring them back."

It is too much to expect that students will get the stimulation, self-confidence, training, and commitment they will need to get directly involved in community affairs as adults if their only contact with that sort of action is through a civics text. They must be immersed in the realities as students.

Last spring, Sherrod Reynolds, one of our staff members, and I taught an experimental course designed to test strategies for and reactions to this immersion. We tried it with five students, but it could have been a full class.

We decided to work with Mountain City, Georgia, a town in our county with a population of about 450, and a town that has done little discussion about or planning for the future. Incorporated in 1903, the residents had never had a town meeting. With the cooperation of the mayor and the city council, we began to work toward having one.

Each of the students chose a nearby town, out of our county, but of similar size. Alone, each made appointments to talk with their town's officials, conducted a series of taped interviews, and took a series of color slides of important features. Then they put together a slide show and script that illustrated how each of the towns had changed over the years, how each had dealt with that

change in different ways, and how each had prepared—or failed to prepare—for the future. The question posed by the show to the residents of Mountain City was, "To what extent can and should we be involved now in planning and shaping the future according to what we, as a group, want for our town?"

The students also researched and drew two complete maps, one showing what the town looked like thirty years ago, and another showing each house and building in the town today. They then drew up an announcement of the scheduled town meeting, had it printed, and distributed copies door to door to every house and business in the city limits.

On the appointed evening, nearly a hundred residents showed up. The mayor made some announcements concerning a planned town sewer and water project for which he had been trying to get federal help, and opened the floor to questions. Then the students presented their slide show and the maps. A long discussion followed, culminating in the request for more such meetings. The students organized two more, one of them complete with packets that contained more maps, copies of town ordinances that had been referred to in previous meetings, etc.

By the end of the twelve-week quarter, twenty-four residents had formed a committee to sponsor a townwide cleanup as one small initial form of community action. The cleanup was announced by the students, again through a door-to-door campaign. When it was held, the residents turned out in force to clean up their own yards, clean and mow the sides of every town street, and haul off all the trash they could find. A chicken barbecue and a square dance followed that afternoon. The committee still exists today, and now has students involved in plans for a city park and fountain.

A small beginning, but a beginning nevertheless. And the students who were involved know far more now about town politics, the structure of the city council and its duties, and positive organized town action than they would ever have learned in a classroom. It will be fascinating to watch them as adults.

The school and the community must marry. We've only begun the courtship, but already students in our classes, through the creation of visible end products created within, about, and with the co-operation and involvement of the surrounding towns, keep the residents in our area constantly involved in their work. Television shows Mike Cook and his students create are broadcast daily over the county CATV network. In fact, students run the CATV studio as part of their academic work. Radio shows that students create

are broadcast locally. *Foxfire* magazine is constantly visible as are the record albums that come out of George Reynolds' classroom. Bob Bennett's environmental class recently displayed the solar collectors they had designed and built in the parking lot of the local bank, and Paul Gillespie's photography classes mount regular exhibitions of their work in the lobby of the same bank. When a group of my students helped a class of sixth-graders design and build a low-cost playground at their elementary school, the local newspaper devoted three pages of text and photographs to that project. (The willingness and ability of students to get involved in such ways, and their passion for doing so, has been documented hundreds of times by the National Commission of Resources for Youth [36 West 44th Street, New York, N.Y. 10036]. You might want to receive their newsletter.)

Fifth: There should be an atmosphere inside the school, fostered by the principal, of fermentation, excitement, and anticipation—the feeling that something is *happening* that is good and worth being a part of—all laced with a generous dose of the unexpected. Much of this will result automatically from allowing the previous four principles to dominate the school's life, but in addition to this, principals should encourage experiments that involve the entire school population. Some of them will fail, many will not; and in the right environment of creative unpredictability, all will be applauded as attempts worth the trying.

One of the most vivid illustrations I can give of this sort of school-wide experimentation (or craziness, if you will) happened recently in our school for the first time when our organization, in association with the school librarian and her staff, and with the co-operation of the principal and all the teachers, sponsored a three-day celebration of community resources. With the exception of two-period blocks each day for activities that the entire student body witnessed (concerts, plays, etc.), every class on every day was visited by a person from the community who could bring what was being studied in that classroom to life. An American history class was studying the Depression at the time, and so the people who visited that class were ones who could add a human, here-in-Rabun-County orientation to the study of that subject. They were people who, for example, had worked in CCC camps and on WPA projects in the area, and even included the Under Secretary of Agriculture for Roosevelt who lives in our county and was able to give a fascinating, behind-the-scenes look at that period of time in a way a text never could. A

chemistry class was visited by a chemist from the local Burlington carpet mill who demonstrated the mixing of chemical dyes and talked about the role of chemistry in his work. A biology class was visited by a beekeeper who came with all the tools of his trade; an English class studying poetry, by a local songwriter; a drafting class, by an architect; a business class, by a secretary; a government class, by our local state representative; a small engine repair class, by a man who makes his living in that field—and so on, in every class, for three days. Hundreds of community residents were involved in a co-ordinated assault that kept the students in a state of anticipation and excitement I had never seen before—an invasion of the fortress that people in this area are still talking about. During an evaluation period the following week, 953 students (out of 956) and every teacher said they would like to see the same thing happen again the following school year. Since then, teachers who had never before invited community residents to work with them have been doing so with regularity.

A problem in many schools is that principals allow themselves to become so buried in the day-to-day minutiae of maintaining the status quo that they despair of ever having time to do anything else. Perhaps asking more of them is asking too much, but in schools where principals dream in broad strokes and lead and inspire in such ways, breaking out of the day-to-day and forcing a sense of forward motion and experimentation, the school is transformed in a magical way.

Some of you—teachers, students, principals, parents, librarians, school-board members, custodians, grandparents, and the like—may be tempted to use the yardstick I have drafted primarily for myself in evaluating your own school. May I offer two cautions?

• Use my yardstick as exactly that—a measuring device, not a road map. The examples of specific activities I have given, *Foxfire* magazine included, grew naturally and organically out of, and were tailor-made to, the needs of their specific environments. Different kinds of activities that evolve from your own situation's soil *will* (and perhaps already do) serve you far better than carbon copies of those developed by others. In fact, sometimes the developing and the testing of a new idea becomes as much a solution as the final project itself.

• The principles I advocate are evolutionary and based on personal observation. I grow and change as a teacher, my ideas change

over time, and this list of principles will change with me. In their present form, they represent what will probably seem to me a pinched and limited vision after my next fourteen years in the classroom. Don't accept them at face value. Change them. Challenge them. Add to them.

Above all, move. Refuse to accept the status quo. Refuse to allow yourself to believe that you have finally found "the way." *Know* that despite the fact that public schools are less than perfect learning environments, within them exciting and creative environments can be nourished where genuine learning does take place; with sensitive leadership those environments can spread within the system to infect the whole and to embrace the surrounding communities and the larger community of man to the ultimate benefit of all.

I have not seen even this limited vision happen yet within even one entire public school. I have seen enough pieces of it happen to various extents in my school and others, however, to be convinced that it is a workable and attainable, if limited, dream.

And I am positive that when that dream does come true, at last, in one school, somewhere, that that school will shine like a lighthouse beacon across this land.

BEW